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Allegiances

[image]

SHADOWCLAN

Leader: Kestrelstar- brown tabby tom

Deputy: Bearpounce- black tabby tom with a short, stubby tail

Medicine Cat: Snowpatch- grey tom with white patches and blue eyes

Warriors:

Mudpuddle- dark brown tabby tom

Curledfur- sandy she-cat with curly fur

Dovetooth- white tabby she-cat

Prickleberry- fluffy dark grey tabby tom with amber eyes

Rainwillow- light grey and white tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Bluewater- blue-grey she-cat

(Apprentice, Bramblepaw)

Hailfall- white tom with brown patches

(Apprentice, Lichenpaw)

Rustpelt- dark ginger she-cat with green eyes

Flashstep- grey and black tabby tom

Darkmoss- dark grey tabby tom

Waspfur- grey and black tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Runningheart- brown and grey she-cat

Apprentices:

Lichenpaw- brown and white tabby tom

Bramblepaw- dark brown tabby she-cat

Queens:

Batflight- black she-cat,mother of Hailfall's kits: Falconkit (white-and-brown tom-kit), Shadedkit (black she-kit), Elmkit (white tom-kit with black patches)

Elders:

Clovershade- tawny she-cat

Hazelclaw- dark brown she-cat starting to going deaf

THUNDERCLAN

Leader: Foxstar- dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Deputy: Marigoldfern- golden tabby she-cat

Medicine Cat: Deermist- grey tabby she-cat

Warriors:

Redspark- red she-cat

Firespot- orange tabby tom with a spotted pelt

Emberflurry- dark orange she-cat

(Apprentice, Dewpaw)

Antrunner- black and brown tabby tom

Leafsting- white she-cat with yellow eyes

Mothstrike- light brown tabby she-cat

Flintflash- grey long-haired tom

Lionstrike- golden-brown tabby tom with green eyes

Doestep- light cream she-cat

Bluemist- dark grey she-cat

Stagfoot- black tabby tom

Brownfern- dark brown tabby she-cat

Jaggedleap- ginger tom

(Apprentice, Nutpaw)

Stonewhisker- dark grey tom with short whiskers

Shortstride- small grey tom

Blossomwing- tawny she-cat

Apprentices:

Dewpaw- brown tabby tom with white chest

Nutpaw- light brown she-cat

Queens:

Rainglow- light grey tabby she-cat, expecting Firespot's kits

Elders:

Wildbush- brown tom

Beechstep- light grey tabby tom

Thistlesight- black tabby tom with one blind eye

RIVERCLAN

Leader: Amberstar- dark orange she-cat with brown tail-tip and green eyes

Deputy: Pinewhisker- light brown tom with white paws and amber eyes

Medicine Cats: Streamswirl- white she-cat with ginger flecks and green eyes
Driftwater- dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Warriors:

Fishpatch- smoky grey tom with white belly

Toadleap- dark grey tom with white belly

Orangelake- speckled ginger she-cat

Frogskip- dark grey and white tom

Appleblossom- light golden-brown tabby she-cat

Waterheart- black tom with white tail tip

Swallowflight- dark brown tabby she-cat

(Apprentice, Cloudedpaw)

Seedfall- small ginger she-cat with blue eyes

Pebbletooth- dark grey tom with lighter grey spots and green eyes

(Apprentice, Ravenpaw)

Cinderstream- light grey tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Eelfang- black she-cat

Tigerwing- dark ginger tabby tom

Mistyclaw- light grey tabby she-cat

Puddlefoot- dark grey tabby tom with white paws

Apprentices:

Ravenpaw- black she-cat

Cloudedpaw- black tom with cream patches

Queens:

Sweetmoss- light cream she-cat who remains in the nursery, helps nurse Amberstar's kits: Flamekit (dark orange she-kit), Dawnkit (light brown she-kit with white patches), Quietkit (dark orange tabby tom-kit with white chest and paws)

Wolfwhisper- very dark grey she-cat with brown legs, mother of Lizardwing's kits: Lizardkit (light brown tabby tom-kit), Duckkit (dark grey she-kit), Fernkit (dark grey tom-kit with brown paws)

Elders:

Palestride- light grey tom

Ripplecloud- dark grey tom with light grey tabby stripes

Sprucejump- dark brown she-cat

WINDCLAN

Leader: Eveningstar- black tom with white flecks

Deputy: Sunleaf- orange and white she-cat

Medicine Cats: Maplefur- red-brown mottled she-cat

Apprentice, Beeflight-ginger tom with black tabby stripes

Warriors:

Twistedfoot- black and white she-cat with a twisted forepaw

Dawnmist- grey she-cat

Cindercloud- light grey and white she-cat

Silvershine- silver tabby she-cat

Owlflight- brown tabby tom

Beetleclaw- black tabby tom with amber eyes

Juniperleaf- ginger she-cat

Daisywhisper- white she-cat

Brightsun- light brown tabby she-cat

Eaglewing- brown and white tom

Lilyblossom- ginger and white she-cat

Icefang- white tom

Ashfleck- grey spotted tom

Willowfoot- tortoiseshell she-cat

Dustfall- dusky brown tabby tom

Nightfrost- black tom with amber eyes

Cherrystep- brown tabby she-cat

Pigeonfeather- light grey tom with fluffy fur

Smokefur- black tom

Leafstripe- grey tabby tom

Shellfoot- light grey she-cat

Specklepounce- speckled grey she-cat

Rapidspirit- light brown tabby tom

Antnose- white and brown tabby tom

Blizzardcoat- white she-cat

Queens:

Flowersong- golden-brown tabby she-cat with yellow eyes, mother of Nightfrost's kits: Darkkit (black she-kit), Birchkit (golden tabby tom-kit), Amberkit (dark orange tabby she-kit)

Elders:

Vinetail- white she-cat with black tabby stripes and a long tail

Palemist- light grey tabby she-cat with broken hind-leg

THE SANCTUARY

Leader: Tiago- long-haired light brown dappled tom

Rocket- large, silver tom

Icicle- white she-cat

Reef- small, light brown tom

Bucky- black tom with red collar

Cinnamon- red-brown she-cat

Smoke- dark grey tom

Angel- black and white she-cat

Bianca- tortoiseshell she-cat

Coffee- dark brown tabby tom

Spider- black and grey tabby tom

Flit- orange tabby tom

CATS OUTSIDE CLANS

Jenga- soft furred light brown Bengal she-cat with green eyes, from Horseplace

Yeti- long haired white tom from Horseplace

Charlotte- sandy-yellow tabby she-cat with green eyes

Prologue

The warm Greenleaf sun cast dapples across the ground through the undergrowth as a small, light brown tom stood in a patch of sun, soaking it up. He wasn't used to the fresh air with trees swaying above him and sunlight warming his pelt. Leaves rustled around him as prey scuttled about the undergrowth, and he was startled as a small, grey mouse darted in front of him and under a bush, too fast for him to even try and catch.

"Reef!" a voice boomed behind him.

Reef turned around to face a large silver tom, anger flaring in his eyes.

"What have we told you over and over again? *Focus!*" the tom growled.

Reef looked down at the ground in embarrassment. "I'm sorry, Rocket," he mewed. "I'm just not used to places like this. It's so much nicer than the Sanctuary!"

"Why do you think we're *here,* numbskull?" a white she-cat growled coldly as she stepped out of a nearby bush. "We need to find the *perfect* spot."

"And you just let a perfectly easy catch run straight past you!" Rocket added, his tail swishing crossly.

Reef hung his head. "I promise I'll catch the next one."

Rocket rolled his eyes, then smiled. "You're still young, you have a lot to learn. *I'll* catch the next piece of prey."

"Stop being so nice to the kit. He needs to grow up," the white she-cat snarled.

I'm not a kit anymore, Reef thought indignantly, though he kept his mouth shut.

"Leave him alone, Icicle," Rocket defended. "He's learnt his lesson."

Icicle let out a low growl, then walked off into a nearby clump of ferns, flicking her tail dismissively.

Rocket let out a soft chuckle, then padded on, leading Reef.

"This is the most prey I've ever smelled!" Reef mewed excitedly.

"Well it'll all be gone if you keep yapping so loudly," Rocket meowed sarcastically.

Reef awkwardly laughed, and continued following the older tom. Rocket's nose was raised in the air, drawing in all the scents around him. Suddenly, the large tom came to a halt, stopping Reef with his tail. He angled his ears toward a small bramble bush, where a shrew had just emerged, nibbling on a nut.

Reef nodded, staying as quiet as possible, and watched as Rocket stalked forward, and expertly killed the prey with a single pounce.

"That was incredible, Rocket!" Reef meowed, springing up. "I think the others will love this place."

"I think so too," Rocket agreed, a proud gleam in his eyes.

As Rocket picked up the prey, a new scent bathed over Reef's tongue; it was a cat scent for sure, but not one that he recognised. It was a mixture of undergrowth and prey scent. Rocket seemed to notice too, and the pair of cats whipped around at the sound of a voice.

"What do you think you're doing on our territory?!" It was a golden tabby she-cat, and a group of three other cats stood behind her, all with challenging glints in their eyes.

Rocket exchanged a confused glance with Reef, then placed his shrew down.

"Um...hunting? What does it *look* like we're doing?" he meowed smugly.

"Don't get smart with us, *rogue!*" another cat meowed, his golden-brown tabby pelt bristling. "This is *our* territory, and you can't hunt on it!"

"Since when do cats *own* land? You can't dictate who can and can't hunt here. Prey belongs to whoever is skilled enough to catch it," Rocket rebuffed, his tail bristling with anger.

"Well we *are* the ones skilled enough to catch it, so back off!" the golden tabby she-cat growled, her claws sliding in and out.

The bushes behind Reef rustled, and Icicle stepped out, a confused look on her face. "What is going on here?"

"All three of you need to get off ThunderClan territory!" the golden tabby she-cat, who Reef guessed was in charge, yowled. "And you will leave that shrew with us."

"Sure I will. Why don't I leave my tail here with you as well, since you seem to be asking for things that aren't yours," Rocket snarled, sliding his claws out.

The golden tabby hissed at Rocket, her eyes narrowing into slits. A low growl started in Rocket's chest, before he let out a loud yowl, and lunged at the golden tabby.

Reef stood in place, shocked, as did the cats of the other group. Reef knew that he, Icicle and Rocket were outnumbered by them.

The golden tabby let out a yowl as Rocket clawed at her ear and face, and Reef almost felt bad for her. He looked at the other members of the tabby's group; they all seemed unsure of what to do.

Rocket was easily overpowering the tabby, and he managed to pin her to the ground, unable to move her legs. He snarled at her, and Reef could tell he was rearing to deliver a killing blow to her throat.

"Rocket, no!" Reef yowled, but the silver tom ignored him.

The golden tabby struggled fiercely, and a look of fear flashed across her face. Reef was about to jump in, when the tabby

managed to get one foreleg free, and in a heartbeat, slashed her claws across Rocket's throat as he was only a mouse-length away from her throat.

Rocket spluttered, blood spurting from his mouth and throat, and he collapsed onto the ground beside the tabby.

"No!" Reef yowled.

"You'll pay for that!" Icicle growled, readying herself to lunge at the tabby.

Reef jumped in front of her. "We're outnumbered, we need to go!"

The golden tabby she-cat had staggered to her feet, and glared at the two rogues.

"*Now!*" Reef emphasised.

Icicle hesitated for a moment, then nodded and tore off in the direction they came from, Reef right behind her.

"Get them!" he heard the tabby she-cat yowl, and soon, the group of cats were only a tail-length behind them.

A caterwaul sounded behind Reef, alerting him to one of the cats that had leaped at him. A dark orange she-cat landed on top of him, knocking the air from him. He wheezed, trying to push against the she-cat with all of his might, but she easily overpowered him in size *and* strength. He could see that the muscular golden-brown tabby tom was in a scuffle with Icicle, claws and teeth flying around.

Reef tried to turn himself around, but the orange she-cat pushed him further into the ground, her claws beginning to dig into his back.

"Let me go!" he yowled helplessly, thrashing his legs. He felt so worthless; he couldn't even fight back against this she-cat. All he could do was watch the fight between the tabby tom and Icicle.

Icicle managed to get in a few good blows on the tom's cheek and side, but ultimately, the tom was more bulky and clearly more

skilled in combat than her, and pinned her down.

"Good," the golden she-cat growled lowly. "Now, kill her."

The tabby tom looked at her, shocked. "What?"

"Kill her! She's an outsider!" the she-cat yowled at him.

"But, she's defenseless! That would be against the warrior code," a small brown tabby tom meowed, stepping up to the golden she-cat.

"They're outside the warrior code! They don't matter!"

"Every cats' life matters, regardless of if they're in a Clan or not," the orange she-cat on top of Reef argued back.

"Then I'll do it!" The golden tabby she-cat shoved the tabby tom off Icicle and, with one swift movement, ripped at her throat with her teeth.

Reef let out a yowl of despair, angrily scrabbling his paws to try and claw at the she-cat pinning him down.

"Why would you do that, Marigoldfern?" the small tabby tom asked. "Lionstrike had already won!"

"No one steals from ThunderClan!" Marigoldfern shouted at the little tom. She looked up to face the orange she-cat on top of Reef. "Now him!"

"What? *No!*" the orange she-cat protested. "He's barely out of the nursery, no bigger than Dewpaw here!"

"You're *weak,* Emberflurry." Marigoldfern glared at Reef for a moment, then chuckled maliciously. "Run away, little kit. And *never* come back to the Clans' territory."

Emberflurry stepped off from Reef, allowing him to finally breathe properly. He took one last solemn look at Icicle and Rocket's bodies, then darted away, willing his small legs to carry him as fast as possible. He wanted to wail like a little kit, but he kept going until he couldn't even see the four cats anymore.

He stood at the top of a ridge, looking back in the direction of where Rocket and Icicle's helpless bodies lay.

Thosecats will pay for killing my friends. Them and all of these so called 'Clan'cats. Tiago will make sure of it.

Chapter One

[image]

"Ooh! I see a bird up there!" Lichenpaw mewed.

Rainwillow glanced up into the tall pine tree to see where the brown and white apprentice was angling his ears. She let out a *mrrow* of amusement.

"Unless you can sprout wings like one, there's no way you're catching a bird that high up in a tree," she told the apprentice.

Hailfall, Lichenpaw's mentor, purred. "She's right. It's early Greenleaf, there'll be plenty of other birds much *closer* to us."

Lichenpaw hung his head in disappointment, and continued padding behind his mentor. Rainwillow couldn't help but smile at the young apprentice's eagerness to impress the warriors; she had always wanted her own apprentice, but she knew she would get to train one when the time was right, she just needed to wait.

Rainwillow drew in a deep breath, allowing the warm, fresh air to fill her chest. The scent of prey and pine needles filled her nose, washing her with a sense of comfort. She had always felt so safe within her territory on ShadowClan, with the tall pine trees providing her with shade during the hot seasons, and shelter during the rain.

Her attention was drawn away when she heard a scuttling to her side. She turned to see a small, brown mouse had stuck its little head out of a thorn bush to inspect a berry on the ground.

Rainwillow licked her lips and dropped down into a crouch, being sure to keep her thick tail off the ground to avoid alerting the prey. She slowly moved one paw in front of the other, keeping her eyes on the mouse that was now preoccupied with nibbling at its berry. As Rainwillow steadied herself to pounce, she moved her forepaw forward slightly, and a sharp pain pierced through her leg. She let

out a loud yelp of pain, making the mouse hurry away.

"What was that for?" Rustpelt huffed with annoyance as she padded up to Rainwillow.

"Sorry," Rainwillow mewed. She lifted her paw to inspect it; just as she suspected, there was a thorn sticking out of it, and a small trickle of blood was oozing out.

"Mouse-dung," she hissed.

"Ouch! That looks like it hurts!" Lichenpaw had bounded up to her and was staring intently at the thorn in her pad. "Can I pull it out?"

"Don't even think about it," Hailfall ordered his apprentice. He looked down at Rainwillow's pad, inspecting it the best he could. "You should head back to camp, there's no way you can hunt with *that* sticking out of your paw."

Rainwillow nodded, giving her stinging pad a gentle lick. "I'll get Snowpatch to take it out. I know he's dealt with his fair share of thorns!" she mused.

Rainwillow flicked her tail to the three cats and turned to head back to camp, limping so she didn't put any weight on her forepaw. She purred as one of her memories of her and Snowpatch as apprentices came to her; Rainwillow had always been so proud of her brother for becoming a medicine cat that when she was a young apprentice, she had purposely jammed a thorn into her paw just so she would have an excuse to visit him in the medicine den and see his skills up close. Of course, Flowerpelt, Snowpatch's mentor, wasn't too pleased when she found out that this silly apprentice had stuck a thorn into her own paw. Rainwillow shook her head in amusement at her own stupidity.

Rainwillow hobbled her way into camp, carefully placing her good paw as she walked through the thorn tunnel entrance. Making her way into the medicine den, she was thankful for her thick pelt as bramble tendrils dragged at her fur. The strong scent of herbs hit her immediately, but Snowpatch's grey and white pelt was nowhere in sight. Rainwillow let out a huff of annoyance, and pushed her

way back out of the den.

Bearpounce, ShadowClan's deputy, padded up to Rainwillow. "Weren't you on a hunting patrol?" he asked her, his head tilted slightly.

Rainwillow nodded. "Yeah, but I stood on a thorn and wanted Snowpatch to help out. Where is he, anyway?"

"Oh, he went out to collect some herbs, said something about this being the perfect time to collect coldfoot, or coltspaw, something like that," Bearpounce informed her.

"You clearly know your way around a medicine den," Rainwillow joked sracastically.

Bearpounce rolled his eyes. "I don't know how he manages to remember so many names, let alone where to find all these things."

Bearpounce stopped for a second, his whiskers twitching slightly.

"Come to think of it, he left quite a while ago, early this morning. He should've been back by now I would think." Bearpounce looked around, as if trying to look for the medicine cat.

Concern gripped Rainwillow's paws; her brother was a very organised cat, and never took long to complete any tasks.

He knows how to take care of himself, Rainwillow told herself. *I don't need to worry. I can deal with my paw myself, anyway.*

Rainwillow dipped her head to the deputy. "I'm sure he'll be back soon. Thanks anyway, Bearpounce."

Rainwillow gave her grey pelt a shake, trying not to let her worry linger, and limped back into the medicine den. She'd been in there so many times to visit Snowpatch, and he had shown her a fair number of the herbs, but she didn't have a mind for medicine like her brother did. *There's no way I would even know which of these herbs to use, they all look the same to me.*

Rainwillow sat down on the pine needle-covered ground to steady

herself and raised her paw to properly inspect it; it was a reasonably small thorn, so it wouldn't have done much damage anyway. She remembered what Snowpatch had done the last time she had a thorn in her pad, and licked her pad until the thorn was dislodged enough. She gripped the end of the thorn in her teeth, and yanked it out. A stinging pain shot through her pad as she did, but it faded away fairly quickly. She knew that if Snowpatch were here, he'd put some sort of herb poultice on it, but Rainwillow didn't know which one *or* what it would even look like. She did know, however, that cobwebs helped stop bleeding. Licking her pad to try and clear as much blood away, she stuck her other forepaw into the corner where a large cobweb stash had been built up, and wound some of the sticky stuff onto her paw. She placed it onto her injured paw and pushed it down, making sure it would stick.

Not too bad, if I do say so myself. Rainwillow was quite pleased with her basic medicinal skills, but she knew they were nowhere near as good as Snowpatch's.

Carefully padding out of the den, she opened her mouth slightly to try and take in Snowpatch's scent, hoping she could go out and find him. His scent was starting to go stale, meaning he had been out of the camp for almost the entire day, which was very unlike him; he never liked to be away from camp for too long in case any cat was suddenly injured, even when he needed to collect herbs.

I'll just have a quick look around the territory for him, Rainwillow decided, attempting to keep her fur flat. She wasn't normally an anxious cat, quite the opposite really, but she had always felt strangely protective over her brother. She knew he was capable of fending for himself, but as a warrior, she felt like it was her duty to keep her medicine cat safe.

As Rainwillow pushed her way out of the thorn tunnel, the patrol she was previously on came face to face with her.

"Do you think you'll live?" Hailfall meowed jokingly.

Rainwillow chuckled half-heartedly, her mind distracted by her brother. "Yeah, I'm all patched up."

"Are you going somewhere?" Rustpelt asked, confused.

"Just looking for Snowpatch, he's out collecting herbs," Rainwillow responded, beginning to walk away again.

Rustpelt and Hailfall exchanged a puzzled glance, before nodding and walking into camp, picking up their prey as they continued on.

Rainwillow couldn't seem to shake the feeling that she needed to find Snowpatch; the sun was starting to set and it would be too dark to find him soon. Ignoring the dull sting in her forepaw, she started at a fast trot, making sure she was staying on Snowpatch's scent trail. The pine needles softly crunched under her paws as she picked up speed, and soon, she found herself getting closer to the lake; the large body of water was glowing orange as the setting sun reflected off it. It was one of her favourite sights during the Greenleaf, but she had no time to enjoy it now. Snowpatch was still nowhere to be seen. The lakeshore was always the main spot Rainwillow would find him when he went out 'herb-catching' as she called it. His scent led down to the shore, so she followed it anyway. The sweet scent of a herb filled her nose, and she looked down to see small yellow flowers strewn about. Some of them were crushed, she guessed they had been stood on.

Rainwillow straightened up again, looking around for any sign of Snowpatch. She had lost his scent amongst the strong smell of the plant.

"Mouse-dung!" she cursed to herself. "Where *is* he?"

She leaned down, sniffing at the yellow flowers; their scent was strong and overpowering, but she could just pick up a hint of Snowpatch's scent, but she had no clue which direction it went from there. Snowpatch's scent was already so herby that Rainwillow could barely distinguish it.

Time for some good old fashioned searching methods.

Rainwillow drew in a deep breath and raised her head up. "Snowpatch!" she yowled. She perked her ears, desperately hoping to hear a response, but all she detected was her voice echoing

across the lake.

Sighing, she turned and padded back into the pine forest. She called out his name every now and then, listening out for his voice in response, but to no avail.

This is ridiculous, she told herself. *He has to be around here somewhere.*

Deciding she needed backup, Rainwillow made her way back to camp, and quickly raced up to Bearpounce

"I need help," she hurriedly meowed. "I can't find Snowpatch anyway, and his scent has gone stale. We need to put together a search party, I can't keep his scent."

Bearpounce was taken aback by the light grey tabby's urgency, a bewildered look on his face.

"Um...okay, yes," he stammered, realising what Rainwillow had said. "I'll round up a few cats and we can head out. Don't worry," he added as he turned to find some more cats, "we'll find him."

I hope.

***

Rainwillow stood outside the thorn tunnel, her tail swishing anxiously as she watched Bearpounce emerge with Mudpuddle, Dovetooth and Waspfur.

"I'll take you to where I last picked up his scent," Rainwillow explained, then raced off. She confirmed that the patrol was behind her by the loud thrumming of their paws against the forest floor. She led them down to the lake, apprehension prickling in her paws as she pelted through the territory. She came to a halt when she saw the yellow flowers sitting beside the lakeshore.

"Here," she puffed out. "I lost his scent here. The flowers are crushed for some reason, like he stepped on them and then walked away."

"That doesn't sound like him," Mudpuddle meowed suspiciously.

Dovetooth's face furrowed in confusion as she stepped forward, sniffing at the plants. "His scent is faint, but I think I have it," she mewed uncertainly.

"I trust you, Dovetooth," Rainwillow reassured the she-cat.

Dovetooth nodded, then turned to face the direction that led towards the RiverClan border, and started slowly moving through the territory, following the faint scent trail.

"I don't get it; why would he just up and leave?" Waspfur asked, annoyance edging her mew.

Rainwillow opened her mouth to respond, but was cut off as Mudpuddle raised his tail to signal for them to stop.

"Wait!" he meowed, his eyes wide and alert. "I think there's another scent here, something like..." Mudpuddle lowered himself to the ground, taking in the scents around him. "Another cat," he concluded. "A stranger, not from any of the Clans."

Bearpounce nodded, his mouth open as well. "There's another one, too, I think it might be-"

"Blood," Rainwillow gasped as the metallic tang hit her tongue. "I smell blood."

All five cats shot worried looks at each other.

"So, what do we know?" Dovetooth prompted them.

"Snowpatch was collecting herbs, when a strange cat approached him," Mudpuddle began.
"Maybe he ran away? That would explain the crushed herbs," Waspfur suggested.

"Right," Bearpounce agreed. "Then the other cat must have tackled him, and they got into a fight, hence the blood."

"So this cat must have Snowpatch then," Rainwillow deduced. "We need to keep following their scents."

The search party all nodded in agreement, and continued tracking the scent trail. Dread washed over Rainwillow as they followed it all the way to the RiverClan border, which the trail crossed over and continued away.

"Oh no..." Dovetooth breathed.

Rainwillow shook her head in disbelief. "Snowpatch has been kidnapped."

Chapter Two

Rainwillow's mind was reeling; how could someone do this to Snowpatch? And *why* did someone do this? Where could he have possibly been taken? Her heart thumped so rapidly in her chest that she was sure the others could hear it.

"Who in the name of StarClan would have kidnapped him?" Dovetooth questioned, looking around.

Bearpounce turned around to face the patrol, his face twisted with concern. "Now hold on," he mewed, clearly trying to remain calm. "We don't *know* that he's been taken, there may be another explanation."

Rainwillow snorted contemptuously. "I'd love to hear your suggestions then." She was trying to keep her fur flat, but anger was starting to take hold of her.

I'll tear the fur off whoever took my brother, she silently vowed.

Waspfur stepped forward, a low growl rumbling in her throat. "I say we storm into RiverClan camp and demand to know if they saw anything."

Rainwillow had half a mind to agree with the young she-cat, but held her tongue.

"I don't exactly feel like getting my paws wet," Mudpuddle commented sarcastically.

"Well wait a moment," Bearpounce said, "Waspfur has a point."

Waspfur's amber eyes lit up with pride. "See? I told you we should-"

"But we're not *storming* into RiverClan," Bearpounce added before Waspfur could finish what she was saying. The grey and black tabby grumbled in annoyance.

Rainwillow nodded. "We can ask them if they saw anything, though," she said, realising what Bearpounce meant.

The deputy dipped his head slightly. "Exactly. We just need to wait for one of their patrols."

"That could take *forever!"* Waspfur argued. "Snowpatch could be way too far away by then."

Rainwillow realised the tabby she-cat had a point. She looked up at the sky, watching the setting sun for a moment. "It's dusk now, there should be a patrol coming around soon," she pointed out.

"So, we'll wait until we see a patrol, and explain what has happened," Dovetooth meowed. The other four cats nodded in agreement, and they all sat down, waiting for a RiverClan patrol.

As Rainwillow sat there, anxiety began to fill inside her again. She kept thinking of all the different and horrible things that may have happened to Snowpatch, which made her more and more worried every moment.

It felt as though the patrol had been sitting there for a moon by the time Rainwillow noticed movement further up in RiverClan territory. She immediately jumped to her paws, the fur along her spine rising.

"I see a patrol!" she told her Clanmates.

Mudpuddle had already risen to his paws; he must have seen the patrol as well. Bearpounce quickly stood up and stepped right up to the border, patiently waiting for the RiverClan patrol to notice them.

Waspfur rolled her eyes. "Hey fish-eaters!" she yowled.

Rainwillow shot the young she-cat a shocked look. "You do realise we want them to *help* us, right?"

Waspfur shrugged indifferently. "They hadn't seen us. Now they have. I helped."

Rainwillow shook her head in annoyance, but at least the RiverClan patrol was now approaching the border.

As the patrol came closer, Rainwillow could make out who was in it; Pebbletooth, a grey spotted tom, was in the lead with a black apprentice trotting beside him. Behind them followed Appleblossom and Tigerwing, a young RiverClan tom Rainwillow had recently met for the first time at a Gathering.

As the RiverClan patrol reached the border, Rainwillow could see the anger on Pebbletooth's face. "Is there a reason you're standing so close to our border and insulting us?" he asked, glaring at Waspfur as he spoke.

Bearpounce cleared his throat, and Pebbletooth looked taken aback as he realised that the ShadowClan deputy was there. "We need to speak with Amberstar, and preferably your Clanmates as well," the deputy explained calmly.

The black apprentice tilted her head to the side. "Why do you need to speak to RiverClan?" she asked somewhat cautiously.

Rainwillow couldn't stop herself as her worry for her brother took over, and she took a stride forward. "Snowpatch has been stolen, and he was taken across RiverClan territory. We don't know who did this or why, we're just asking for your help."

The four RiverClan cats all exchanged confused glances with each other, and silence fell over the two patrols.

Finally, Appleblossom spoke up. "We should help them, what have we got to lose?" she mewed.

Rainwillow smiled gratefully at the golden-brown she-cat.

Pebbletooth stayed quiet for a moment, before sighing. "Alright, fine, but one of you needs to stay on your territory."

Rainwillow looked at the ShadowClan patrol, realising that they outnumbered the RiverClan cats.

"I can go back," Mudpuddle offered. "I'll tell Kestrelstar what

happened."

Bearpounce nodded approvingly; Rainwillow watched as Mudpuddle bounded away, back towards camp.

Pebbletooth flicked his tail with satisfaction. "Alright, follow us then. Appleblossom and Tigerwing, you take the rear."

Rainwillow eagerly stepped over the border marking, desperately hoping that answers about her brother lay in RiverClan's camp. She would soon find out.

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Rainwillow stared at the stepping stones in front of her with apprehension; water splashed over the stones, making them look slippery.

"What is it with other Clans and water?" Tigerwing sighed impatiently. "This is the only way to the camp, unless you want to *swim*."

Rainwillow's ears flattened at the idea, and she swiftly jumped to the first stepping stone and over the others. She could hear Tigerwing laugh as she reached the other side.

"Knew that would work," he chuckled.

Rainwillow exchanged a nervous glance with Bearpounce as Pebbletooth led them into the camp; several pairs of glowing eyes immediately turned to Rainwillow and the patrol, making her pelt burn with unease.

Pebbletooth turned to the ShadowClan cats. "Wait here," he told them, before bounding into a small bramble thicket.

As the ShadowClan cats waited there, Rainwillow could hear many hushed whispers coming from around the camp, and a moment later, the deputy Pinewhisker padded up to them.

"I didn't know we were expecting visitors today," he meowed politely to Bearpounce, dipping his head to his fellow deputy.

"Well, we weren't *planning* on visiting, but we need to speak with Amberstar," Bearpounce told the light brown tom.

A heartbeat later, Amberstar appeared from the bramble thicket and padded up to the ShadowClan patrol. Rainwillow could practically taste the milk scent on the leader as she drew in a breath, and realised that she had come from the nursery.

"Greetings, Bearpounce," Amberstar meowed respectfully to the deputy. "Pebbletooth tells me that your medicine cat has gone missing."

"Not just missing; kidnapped," Bearpounce corrected.

Rainwillow cautiously stepped forward. "His scent crossed through RiverClan territory, along with the scent of blood, and of another cat, probably a rogue. We think he was taken through your territory," she explained slowly, making sure the RiverClan leader took in everything she was saying.

Amberstar's green eyes flooded with sympathy. "I see. I can ask my Clan if they've seen anything. Maybe-"

As she spoke, squeals erupted from the nursery, interrupting the leader. A dark orange kit burst out of the nursery, followed by a light brown-and-white kit, excited mewls coming from both of them.

"Sweetmoss said that there are ShadowClan cats here!" the dark orange she-kit squeaked happily. The two kits stopped next to the RiverClan leader, gazing at the ShadowClan cats in awe.

"Is that them?" the light brown she-kit asked. "Are they real ShadowClan cats, mother?"

A look of embarrassment flashed across Amberstar's face, and she looked down at the two kits. "Flamekit, Dawnkit, this is leader business," she mewed sternly. "You should be with Sweetmoss in the nursery."

"But we wanted to see the mean ShadowClan cats!" the dark orange she-kit, Flamekit, piped eagerly.

Amberstar sighed as she turned back to the patrol; Rainwillow held back a snort of amusement.

"I'm sorry about them," the leader mewed quickly. "They get very excited."

Rainwillow purred. "They're adorable," she reassured Amberstar.

The light brown she-kit, Dawnkit, stepped closer to the strangers, her little white paws kneading the ground. "Are you ShadowClan cats mean?" she asked earnestly.

Amberstar seemed to almost bury her face in her chest fur from embarrassment.

"Sweetheart, you can't say that to our guests," Amberstar told her kit.

Bearpounce chuckled softly. "I don't think we're all *that* mean, though maybe Waspfur can be a bit mean sometimes."

The young tabby rolled her eyes behind the ShadowClan deputy.

Amberstar drew in a deep breath and let out a long sigh. "Right, now about your medicine cat-"

"His name is Snowpatch," Rainwillow added.

Amberstar dipped her head. "Of course, yes. Snowpatch. When was he last seen on your territory?"

"A little while after dawn," Bearpounce informed the leader.

Amberstar nodded her head, looking around at her Clanmates. "I'll check with Pinewhisker to see who was on the dawn patrol, maybe they saw something." She turned to face her deputy, their heads low as they spoke softly.

As they waited for the deputy and leader to finish discussing, another kit, a dark orange and white kit, started racing from the nursery, followed by a cream-coloured she cat.

"Quietkit! You need to be in the nursery," Sweetmoss called out to the tom-kit. "You too Flamekit and Dawnkit!"

Quietkit bowled into his littermates, knocking them all to the ground. Sweetmoss looked apologetically at Amberstar.

"I'm sorry, Amberstar. I tried to keep them in the nursery, but once they heard about the ShadowClan patrol here..." Sweetmoss's tail swished anxiously.

Amberstar's whiskers twitched. "It's quite alright, Sweetmoss. Maybe just take them back to the nursery now, they shouldn't hear any of this."

Rainwillow watched as Sweetmoss ushered the kits back to the nursery, then turned back to her leader. "Is this about the missing ShadowClan medicine cat?"

Rainwillow jumped forward. "Do you know something? Did you see anything?" she quickly asked, desperately hoping for a way to find her brother.

Sweetmoss shook her head sadly. "No, but I'm starting to get worried as well. Waterheart went out early this morning to do a bit of hunting especially for all of the kits, and he's not back. It's already dark now, maybe it's somehow connected to Snowpatch's disappearance."

Rainwillow's eyes widened. "Do you think that *two* cats have been kidnapped?"

Sweetmoss looked shocked. "*Kidnapped?* Dear StarClan, I had no idea! Amberstar, what are we going to do?"

Rainwillow realised that Pinewhisker was standing beside her, his gaze shadowed with concern. "A cat taken from both ShadowClan *and* RiverClan? What if something's happened to the other Clans as well?"

The thought that someone had taken a cat from more than one Clan made Rainwillow's head start to spin with worry.

"Maybe we should ask WindClan and ThunderClan if they've seen anything strange recently," Bearpounce suggested. "They may be missing cats as well."

"We can ask at the next Gathering perhaps," Pinewhisker suggested.

Amberstar shook her head solemnly. "No, that won't work. The next Gathering isn't for another half-moon, who *knows* what might happen to the missing cats in that time."

Rainwillow nodded her head. "Can we call an emergency Gathering?" she suggested.

Amberstar looked hesitant. "I'm not sure. For one thing, we wouldn't be protected under the truce of the full moon, and getting the other Clans to agree to that may be difficult."

Rainwillow was starting to lose hope. "But if they have missing cats as well, they would *have* to agree!"

Amberstar looked at the ground thoughtfully, then exchanged a tentative look with Pinewhisker.

"Alright," she concluded. "We will send a patrol to speak with ThunderClan about an emergency Gathering, if you go to WindClan and do the same. If they both agree, we will meet tomorrow evening at moonhigh on the Island. If they have missing cats as well, they won't want to miss this."

Rainwillow felt satisfied with the resolution they came to, and she dipped her head respectfully to the RiverClan leader. "Thank you," she mewed. "This means a lot to me, to ShadowClan."

Amberstar smiled compassionately at Rainwillow and dipped her head to the patrol. "We will see you at moonhigh tomorrow then."

Bearpounce bowed his head as well, then turned to lead his patrol out of the camp and back towards ShadowClan territory.

"So, when are we going to WindClan?" Waspfur asked eagerly.

"I'll organise a patrol to go at sunup." Bearpounce's ears flicked

irritably. "Hopefully Eveningstar will agree to the meeting."

"I want to come," Rainwillow immediately jumped in, tail lashing.

Bearpounce turned his gaze to Rainwillow, sympathy filling his eyes. "No, I'm sorry, but you're too emotional. I need to be able to have a calm and rational discussion with Eveningstar. Plus, you should get some more rest."

Rainwillow turned away, her head hanging. She could understand Bearpounce's decision, but that didn't mean that she liked it. Snowpatch was her brother for StarClan's sake! Of course she was going to be emotional. Anger and worry bubbled in her, making her want to lash out at the deputy, but she held herself back. She let out a calming breath, trying not to think about what could be happening to Snowpatch at that very moment.

"Okay, I'll wait in the camp while you go to WindClan," she mewed half-heartedly. She didn't like the idea of not knowing what was going to happen, and just having to sit around and wait for news, but as long as there was a way to help find her beloved littermate, she was willing to wait for it.